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# Putting Unity in Its Place: Organic Unity in Plato's Phaedrus

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# Putting Unity in Its Place: Organic Unity in Plato's *Phaedrus*

Franco V. Trivigno

The notion of organic unity has had a long history in aesthetics and art criticism.<sup>1</sup> It is a normative aesthetic ideal, which historically has been applied to several of the fine arts, most prominently painting and literature. Both organic unity itself and its critical uses have their origin in Plato's *Phaedrus*. In the dialogue, Socrates introduces this notion in order to criticize Lysias' speech, which Phaedrus greatly admires. The main goal of this paper is to get clearer on what Plato means by organic unity as a normative principle for writing. I first formulate what I will call the principle of organic unity [OU], and then subject it to a rigorous critique.<sup>2</sup> I argue that the principle is incompatible with earlier claims in the dialogue, that it warrants unfair criticisms of Lysias' speech and that it fails to account for far more serious charges against Lysias. I claim that the principle *as stated* by Socrates is deficient as a critical tool and intentionally incomplete, primarily because it does not accommodate the main intention or purpose of a speech. The principle *as implied* in the *Phaedrus* is, I argue, *teleological*, incorporating a unified function or purpose with respect to the souls of its audience. I attempt to reconstitute the organic ideal and to restore its proper context in the larger discussion of writing by amending the principle in several stages. In the end, I test the reconstructed principle by using it to assess Plato's own intentions in writing the *Phaedrus* and the unity of the *Phaedrus* itself.<sup>3</sup>

## I

At the end of Lysias' speech, Phaedrus' enthusiasm for it is evident.

Visibly "lit up by the speech," he calls it "extraordinary, both in language and other respects" (234c-d).<sup>4</sup> Phaedrus declares that no other could "make a greater or better speech on the same theme (*tou autou pragmatos*)" (234e), on the grounds that Lysias "didn't leave out any of the items that are naturally implied by the topic" and "everything was given a worthy treatment" (235b). Later in the dialogue (263d-266d), Socrates introduces the ideal of organic unity specifically to clarify his criticisms of Lysias' speech. He says:

*Every speech like a living creature should be put together with its own body so that it is not without a head or without a foot but has a middle and extremities, written in such a way that its parts fit together and form a whole. (264c)*

The account, as stated, seems primarily to refer to the *internal* organization of the different parts of a speech.<sup>5</sup> Socrates refers to the "compelling logic of composition," or alternatively, "logographic necessity" (*tina ananchên logographikên*), with which a speech ought to be composed (264b7).

There are "two forms or aspects (*duoin eidoin*)," which contribute to the organic unity of a speech. First, one should begin, as Socrates did in his first speech, with a *definition* of the main topic under discussion (265d). Beginning with a definition allows for "the speech to progress with clarity and internal consistency" (265d). Second, one should proceed to an *analysis*, which divides a topic at its natural joints:

*To have the power, conversely, to cut up a composition, form by form according to its natural joints and not to try to hack through any part as a bad butcher might .... [J]ust as the body, which is one thing, is naturally divided into pairs of things with both parts having the same name (called, for example, left arm and right arm), so also [Socrates'] two speeches assumed that madness is by its nature one form in us, though capable of being divided into two parts. (265e-266a)*

Taken together, these two activities constitute the dialectical method of "collection and division," of which Socrates claims to be "a lover" (266b). They confer nothing less than "the ability to speak and think" (266b).

This account sets the bar for an organically unified speech extremely high. Notice that the ability to fashion a proper definition depends on prior knowledge of the form or essence of the *definiens*. Socrates refers to the ability to fashion a definition as requiring “someone whose *sight* can bring into a *single form* (*mian idean*) things which previously have been scattered in all directions” (265d). Knowledge of the form is, on this account, a necessary condition of an organically unified speech. Thus, the existence of an organically unified speech is predicated on the existence of a dialectician, one skilled in the method of collection and division, who is a perfect knower with respect to the topic at hand.<sup>6</sup>

At this point, it might be useful to formulate the principle of organic unity [OU] in order to assess it:

[OU] *A written speech is organically unified iff it follows a compelling logic of composition which begins with an accurate definition, proceeds to analyze the topic according to its nature, and is written by someone with dialectical knowledge of the topic.*

I want to articulate *five* related criticisms of this ideal from prior sections of the *Phaedrus* itself in order to motivate my distinction between the organic ideal *as stated* and *as implied*. I am not here criticizing the ideal as stated from a perspective outside the text, but rather attempting to show that the ideal's inadequacy can be articulated from within the dialogue's own perspective. This provides at least partial warrant for my claim that it is meant to be reformulated.

First, *Phaedrus* is right to object that “the rhetorical part has escaped” (266c). While rhetoric had been earlier defined as “a certain guiding of the souls (*psychagôgia tis*)” (261a7-8), the ideal as stated is *indifferent to audience*. Second, to the extent that audience is implicitly acknowledged, the account of dialectical knowledge makes it instrumental to the goal of audience *deception*. Knowledge confers the ability to lead another “incrementally, step by small step, through similarities away from the truth to its opposite” (262b). Third, Socrates' ideal omits any mention of *style*. The organic ideal as stated would seem to favor a technically precise discourse, one conducive to the expression of a clear definition

and unequivocal analyses. However, both of Socrates' own speeches were stylistically distinct, the first being similar to Lysias' in its use of certain rhetorical tropes, and the second speech is highly poetic and rich in vividly erotic imagery. Fourth, Socrates' account fails its own rational test by not making the relevant distinctions, or cuts, regarding its own topic: speeches. Socrates does not clearly distinguishing between written and spoken speeches. His principle of organic unity is expressly a criterion for *written* speeches, but he applies it equally to his own speeches, both of which were extemporaneous. Fifth, the ideal contains no reference to *erôs*, or the kind of relationship that must obtain between two people in order for the *erôs* for the forms to be inspired and nourished. This is peculiar, since *erôs* was the foundation of Socrates' mythic account in the *Palinode*. Socrates calls himself a lover of collections and divisions (266b3), but love of a method seems very far from the throbbing, aching, soul-consuming love for one's beloved and the reverential awe and terror caused by the memory of the form provoked through him, as vividly described in the *Palinode* (251aff.).

In the next section, I will pursue yet another criticism of the organic ideal: it does not adequately characterize what is wrong with Lysias' speech, though this is why Socrates introduced it in the first place.

## II

The ideal of organic unity is not articulated as an independent aesthetic principle, but rather for use as a critical tool in order to assess Lysias' speech. It is the beginning of the speech that Socrates scrutinizes:

*You understand my affairs, and you've already heard how I think they help us both, when things work out. Nor do I expect to fail to get what I ask for just because I don't happen to be in love with you.*

*When lovers lose their passion, they come to regret whatever benefits they may have conferred. (230e-231a)*

Socrates interrupts Phaedrus before he finishes the last sentence the first time they critique it (262e), but allows him to finish when they repeat it to set up the second criticism (263e-264a). This is done to emphasize that the

first criticism is focused solely on the first paragraph, whereas the second concerns the relation between the first two paragraphs of the speech. Socrates asserts two main criticisms: first, Lysias does not clearly define love at the beginning of his speech; second, he proceeds in a way that is not logical or systematic but that seems spontaneous. Both criticisms aim to show that Lysias is not someone who knows the truth about his subject, thus making his speech both laughable and artless (262c). However, the ideal fails as a critical tool on two basic counts: the criticisms are unfair, and they omit more serious problems.

Socrates' first criticism begins from the claim that, regarding some topics, like iron and silver, we generally agree about what we mean by them, while regarding others, like goodness and justice, we generally disagree (263a). The good orator will know which topics belong to the 'shared class,' and which to the 'disputed class' (263b). *Erôs* clearly belongs to the disputed class, and this ambiguity is just what makes it ripe for rhetorical manipulation. For the disputed class, it is necessary to compel one's audience to see the topic as a determinate thing by defining it at the beginning. Unlike Socrates' emphatic definition at the beginning of his own speech, Lysias did not begin with a definition and thus did not "compel (*ênankasen*) us to see *erôs* as one definite thing (the way he wanted us to see him)" (263d).

Socrates' second criticism follows immediately upon the first. The speech does not follow any logical order—there is no "compelling logic of composition"—but rather "the elements of the speech were poured out in a heap" (264b). Lysias begins "at the end, swimming through the speech upstream on his back, beginning with what a lover would say to his darling after his love is gone" (264a).<sup>7</sup> Lysias' speech begins at the end in two senses: first, by beginning in the first paragraph with what looks like a summarization of a speech already given; and second, by making the second paragraph begin with the end of the love affair, rather than the beginning. Indeed, Socrates concludes, like the epigram on the tomb of Midas, "it hardly matters in what order" one reads the parts of Lysias' speech (264d-e).

Taken together, Socrates' two criticisms amount to the claim that Lysias'

speech lacks organic unity, as it lacks a clear definition and logical analysis of its topic. Since it lacks these, Socrates concludes that the speech is artless and that Lysias does not know the truth about love and thus does not possess the art of rhetoric. Many commentators have taken Socrates' critique as devastating.<sup>8</sup> A clear assessment of these criticisms, however, will reveal various difficulties for Socrates' account. As I hope to show, Phaedrus was not *entirely* wrong to be excited about—indeed, to be lit up by—Lysias' speech.<sup>9</sup>

Socrates seems to infer, from the lack of a clear definition of 'love,' a failure on the part of Lysias to recognize 'love' as a member of the disputed class of topics. Had Lysias properly recognized love as disputable, he would have begun with a definition. But this seems wrong on several counts. First, Lysias clearly recognizes that love is ambiguous. The disputable nature of love forms the very core of his argument in favor of taking a non-lover.<sup>10</sup> Lysias does not deny that there are some benefits from love, but for every benefit, one can expect at least equal harm. By taking a non-lover, one gets all the benefits of love, without all of its problems and hassles. Second, a clear definition would actually make his speech easier to refute. The lack of a clear definition, according to Socrates, prevents Lysias from getting us to see *Erôs* "the way [Lysias] wanted us to see [*Erôs*]" (263e). But one knows exactly where to attack a speech that begins with a definition. The weight of the core claim of Lysias' speech, by contrast, is diffused amongst the many examples. Lysias *does* get his audience to see love in the way that he wants precisely because he does not define it in the beginning.<sup>11</sup> Third, the criticism assumes that *explication* rather than persuasion is the goal of the speech. This is wrong in two ways: first, the fictional non-lover wants the boy to whom he is speaking to take him as a lover; and second, Lysias is trying to show, through his artful defense of an implausible claim, that one should employ him as a speech-writer. Neither of these goals is necessarily tied to an explication of the nature of love. Finally, Socrates' criticism takes the fictional non-lover as equivalent to, or at least standing in for, Lysias. Socrates, by contrast, *several times* resists being identified with his non-lover (235c-d, 237a-b, 238d, 242d, 244a, 257b, 263d). Even if it did follow that the absence of a definition

were evidence for a speaker's failure to recognize the disputed nature of his topic, it surely does not follow from the fact that the fictional non-lover does not define love that Lysias did not recognize it as disputable. Nor does it follow that Lysias does not know what love is.

Socrates' second criticism, that the speech is thrown together in a heap or lacks a compelling logic of composition, also seems misguided. Socrates himself implicitly acknowledges what is misguided about the criticism, when he claims that Lysias seemed to have said "not without some nobility, whatever came to his mind as he wrote" (264b). This appearance of spontaneity is surely intentional, and as above, part of the rhetorical technique Lysias means to employ in order to effect persuasion. First, the speech is obviously meant as something one says *while already in the process* of seducing a boy. This speech could not possibly be the first thing one said to a boy—rather, it would be something that one works into an already ongoing conversation after having stated one's interest, one's proposal and one's lack of love. So this beginning at the end is hardly a fault of the speech, or is a fault only if one makes an implausible assumption about how the speech is to be employed. Second, the beginning with the end of a love affair is hardly accidental—it is certainly not the case that Lysias composed the speech willy-nilly, taking whatever came to his mind first. Rather, the seemingly illogical structure is an example of *feigned* artlessness.<sup>12</sup> By seeming not to have composed the speech artfully, Lysias artfully persuades the boy of his case. By contrast, the order of Socrates' first speech is so remarkable—so clear and logical—that Socrates has to attribute its composition to divinities (263d-e).<sup>13</sup> Plato's *Phaedrus*, on the other hand, has just such an appearance of spontaneity.

In sum, the ideal of organic unity as stated seems weak as a critical tool, or rather, its legitimacy is called into question by the way Socrates uses it to critique Lysias' speech. Socrates' criticisms seem unfair. To oversimplify somewhat, this is so because Socrates focuses his analysis too narrowly on the speech's formal features and he fails to account for its soul-leading, or *psychagogic*, features. This latter omission is surprising since, prior to the discussion of the organic ideal, Socrates defines rhetoric as a "certain guiding of the soul through words" (261a). One might be tempted to say,



against Socrates, that Lysias' speech is actually admirable for its formal features, when one takes into account his intention to persuade, that is, to guide the soul of his audience. Further, if we take Socrates' two criticisms seriously, then we must conclude that Socrates' first speech is superior to the *Palinode*. Further, it would follow that written speeches, because they are planned and their parts are mapped out ahead of time, are in general better than conversations. These two implications are, in the context of the *Phaedrus*, untenable.

### III

When *Phaedrus* protests that Socrates is "scoffing at our speech" (264e), Socrates cuts off his analysis of Lysias' speech and claims that "Lysias' speech does offer abundant examples which could be profitably examined, provided no one attempted to imitate them" (264e). This suggests that Socrates has in mind to continue his critique, and, perhaps, to elaborate on the ideal of organic unity. I attempt to reconstruct those criticisms from two sources: Plato's criticisms as they are implied by the parody and Socrates' earlier overt criticisms of the speech (234d-235b, 242d-243d). As I will show, these prior criticisms not only anticipate those based on the organic ideal as stated but also go much further in indicating what is truly wrong with Lysias' speech.

There can be little doubt that the speech of Lysias is a Platonic parody. I claim elsewhere that parody is an imitation that distorts its target text, author or genre, and in that distortion, one can often find an implicit criticism.<sup>14</sup> Plato parodies five aspects of the speech in order to display four parodic criticisms. These four criticisms include, but go much farther than, the formal-structural criticisms based on the ideal of organic unity.

First, the speech consists of a set of unrelated arguments which are strung together in a way to give the impression of spontaneity. The parody achieves this effect through the exaggerated use of *kai men dê* (5 times) and *eti de* (4 times) as connectives at the beginning of sentences.<sup>15</sup> These phrases function here as weak connectives which merely list a series of arguments without making any logical connection amongst them.<sup>16</sup>

Second, the rhetorical effect of the speech is accomplished almost

entirely by parallelism, through an excessive use of antithetical grammatical structures. The speech is largely structured by *men ... de* parallelism, of which there are sixteen instances. The use of *men ... de* is mechanical and repetitive, contrasting lovers and non-lovers eight times, nine counting the time the speaker contrasts lovers with himself.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the speech consists primarily in the repeated assertion of the comparative benefits and harms.<sup>18</sup> Further, as Dimock has demonstrated, the speech also parodies Lysias' use of *alla*, in particular his use of eliminative *alla*, (i.e. *ou ... alla*: 'not this ... but this').<sup>19</sup> The speech contains seventeen instances (compared to only 6 in Socrates' speech), and there are six *in succession* near the end of the speech (233e5-234b1).

Third, to the extent that there are arguments, the speech uses, indeed overuses, arguments from 'plausibility'—in two Stephanus pages, we find four uses of *eikos* and cognates. The parody of *eikos* arguments here is likely directed at sophistic rhetoric in general and not necessarily at Lysias in particular.<sup>20</sup> Later, Socrates discusses the 'Plausible Argument' in detail, making it central to the rhetorical art as a whole, and castigating it as an enemy of truth and, in the end, "nothing other than the opinion of the masses" (273b).

Fourth, the speech is impersonal in the extreme, which might be fine for a piece of political rhetoric, but seems offensive in a speech requesting "something so precious" as sexual favors (231d). Both the speaker and the addressee remain totally anonymous. While the speaker uses the second person singular to refer to the boy, he never addresses the beloved in the vocative.<sup>21</sup> Nor does the non-lover give any special reason why he has chosen this boy instead of that. In fact, since such considerations might suggest personal affection, i.e. love, they are ruled out by the premise of the speech. Nor again does he give an adequate reason why the boy should choose the speaker over any other non-lover, except paradoxically by relying on an argument that makes the non-lover parallel to the lover (234b-c).

Last, the speech subtly calls attention to itself precisely as *written*. The use of antithetical turns of phrase suggests prior composition. Most of all, the written character of the speech is most clear from the last words

of the speech: "just ask" (234c). The speech requests *questions* from its audience, almost as a kind of challenge. The speaker does not really think it necessary for anyone to take up this challenge, as he believes that his words are already "sufficient" (234c).

To summarize, the parody asserts four general criticisms of Lysias' speech. First, it is poorly organized. Second, in its overreliance on stylistic phrasing and the 'Plausible Argument,' it reveals an indifference to the truth, that is, the speaker shows no *erôs* for truth. The speech contains almost only "stylistic elaboration" and very little—if any—actual analysis of the topic.<sup>22</sup> Such stylistic elaboration gives the speech impressive-sounding phrases which may very well impress, and thus, persuade, an uncritical audience. Third, the speech reveals an indifference to its audience, that is, the speaker shows no *erôs* for his interlocutor. In this sense, the speech enacts its basic assumption, or put another way, the speech's basic assumption comes in for parodic criticism. Last, the speech cannot, because written, live up to its promise to respond to the boy's—or anybody's—questions.

#### IV

Socrates' prior criticisms of Lysias' speech can be divided into two groups: those which immediately follow the speech (234d-236b) and those which immediately follow Socrates' own non-lover speech (242b-243d). Note that Socrates' first speech is immune to, indeed is composed as a remedy for, the first set of criticisms, but it is targeted, along with Lysias' speech, in the second set of criticisms. The first set is fairly superficial, but instructively so, since the criticisms overlap with those based on the ideal of organic unity.

Socrates first articulates three overlapping criticisms, which focus on the style and organization of the speech. When Phaedrus raises the question of the adequacy of the speech's treatment of its topic, Socrates replies, "I was only thinking of its rhetoric" (235a). On this score, Socrates accuses the speech of being (1) repetitive; (2) lacking depth; and (3) showing off. The entire speech is a series of slight variations on the same *men ... de* claim: Lovers cause harm, while non-lovers only benefit. The

use of eliminative *alla* is “uneconomical,” a way to say “the same thing twice, as it were, once negatively and once positively.”<sup>23</sup> Clearly, a speech which relies so heavily on these grammatical turns of phrase is going to lack depth. The lack of depth is also shown by the preponderance of *kai men dê* and *eti de* in introducing new points. With so many new and logically unrelated points, there is no definition and no real analysis, i.e. no organic unity. Lysias’ “youthful swagger” consists in his showing off his facility with rhetorical phrasing, by repackaging the same points in different ways. Socrates ironically praises the speech because “each of its phrases was clear, compact and well-turned” (235a); the irony comes not from an implied denial that the phrases were in the end well-done but rather from an implied denial of the idea that the accumulation of such well-turned phrases makes a speech well-done. Socrates goes on to say the main problem with the speech is the “arrangement (*tên diathesin*)” of the arguments (236a4). In short, Socrates’ first set of criticisms seems clearly to be focused on the lack of a definition and analysis, that is, the lack of organic unity.

After Socrates gives his own speech, with his head covered, he is stopped from walking away from Phaedrus by his daimonic sign, and realizing his “offense,” he decides to repent his speech and make another one in its place (241e-242d). Here he supplies a new set of criticisms, which find fault with both Lysias’ speech and Socrates’ non-lover speech *for the same reasons*. These reasons reflect some of the more serious parodic criticisms outlined above. Both speeches are castigated as terrible (*deinon*) because they were (1) foolish (*euêthê*) and (2) irreverent (*asebê*). While Socrates’ non-lover speech exceeds Lysias’ in terms of overall organization, it does no better on these more serious grounds. The speeches are foolish, first of all, because they falsely characterize love. Lysias’ speech is a *paignia*, that is, a playful display speech, meant to impress an audience with its virtuoso rhetoric. Its falseness is implicitly acknowledged.<sup>24</sup> To put the same point differently, the speeches are foolish also because they elevate style over truth, being “very refined [and] putting on airs” in an attempt to “win [audience] praise” (242e-243a). The speeches are foolish, second of all, because they are intentionally deceptive. Socrates’ speech makes apparent

what Lysias' speech leaves implicit, that the non-lover is dissembling. Of course, he is, in a vulgar sense, 'in love' with the boy; otherwise, there is no reason why he would proposition him in the first place.

The speeches are shameful and irreverent in that they offend against the god, *Erôs*, which Socrates claims, "could not be bad in any way" (242e). They were both fit for sailors (243b) in constricting the sense of love to base sexual desire and not even considering a nobler kind of love. Of course, the rhetoric of the non-lover speeches would have been entirely undermined by acknowledging a noble form of love, since such a love would clearly be superior to the crass opportunism advocated by the first two speeches. The divine *Erôs* that Socrates restores, in his *Palinode*, includes both *erôs* for one's beloved and *erôs* for the truth. The two loves are not extrinsic to but rather intertwined with one another, since one exhibits one love for the beloved through one's love for the truth, and one exhibits one's love for the truth in philosophical conversation with one's beloved. From this perspective, the two non-lover speeches are irreverent both for failing to exhibit *erôs* for the truth and for failing to exhibit *erôs* for the audience. This connects up with the reasons that the speeches were foolish—their implicitly acknowledged falseness shows no love of truth and their deceptive intention shows no love of other.<sup>25</sup>

The criticisms based on the ideal of organic unity as stated only manage to reveal the most superficial problems with the speech. These superficial objections are met by Socrates' non-lover speech, but that speech, along with Lysias', comes in for more serious criticisms. The ideal of organic unity, if it is to be made adequate, has to reflect these more serious concerns. In order to do this, we need to jump forward in the *Phaedrus* to the last two sections, on *psychagogia* (271c-274b) and on writing (274b-278b).

## V

I hope to have shown so far that the organic ideal as stated is inadequate and intentionally so. I will now attempt to restate the organic ideal *as implied* by a close reading of the last half of the dialogue. Three main questions drive the second half: How does one write well or poorly? Is

rhetoric a *technê*? How does one properly organize a speech? The question about organization (which the principle of organic unity answers) must be understood in the context of the question of whether rhetoric is a *technê*, and that question must be understood in the context of good writing more generally. Thus, I propose to rewrite the principle of organic unity by placing it within the larger context of good writing in general. To remind, the ideal as stated run as follows:

[OU]     *A written speech is organically unified iff it follows a compelling logic of composition which begins with an accurate definition and proceeds to analyze the topic according to its nature and it is written by someone with dialectical knowledge of the topic.*

In order to make my reasoning in this section maximally clear, I will amend the ideal in three stages, each time drawing from an argument in the text in order to build up the ideal as implied. Central to this task will be the restoration of the *soul* to the living organism of the written speech, and that will force upon it a *teleological structure*. The teleological structure is twofold: first, the *telos* of the written speech is the effect it has on the souls of its human audience; second, the *telos* of human being either simply is, or is best achieved through, the possession of knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Success for a written speech is thus intimately linked to the facilitation of success for a human being.

After Socrates has established dialectical knowledge as necessary for the rhetorician, Phaedrus still insists that "the rhetorical part has escaped" (266c). Phaedrus is right about this: though they had earlier defined rhetoric as "a certain guiding of souls (*psychagôgia*) through words, not only in the law courts and other places of public assembly but also in private" (261a), this relationship to an audience is left implicit in the organic ideal as stated. In fact, while Socrates insists that anything done well requires the dialectical method, he does not deny that some part of the rhetorical art has been omitted (266d). After a digression on technical terms from the rhetorical handbooks,<sup>27</sup> Socrates explicitly introduces, or rather reintroduces, the soul into the discussion as something necessary for the art of rhetoric which the rhetorical handbooks leave out (271c). Speeches are composed *in order* to have a certain persuasive effect on

the souls of its audience. This teleological framework is implied but left implicit in the organic ideal as stated.

In order to guide the souls of one's audience successfully, one needs knowledge of the soul and its different types. To achieve this, the speech-writer will need to "demonstrate the essence of the nature" of the soul (270e). He will have to "describe the soul with full precision (*pasêi akribeiai*)" (271a). The procedure for this task, as with that for speaking about "the nature of anything whatsoever," involves asking whether "a nature is simple or multi-formed ... . [I]f simple, we should consider its natural capacity ... . If it has multiple forms, we must count these and examine each of them" (270c-d). The discussion proceeds, without arguing for it, as though the soul were indeed multi-formed.<sup>28</sup> This is not surprising given the elaborate account of the different kinds of soul in the *Palinode*. Since different types of souls are affected in different ways by different types of speeches, the orator must be able to match the forms of soul to the forms of speech. He does this in order to be able "to explain sufficiently what type of person is persuaded by what type of speech" and "to perceive and to determine for himself in the case of an individual he meets that he is this type of person" (271e-272a).<sup>29</sup> These considerations force both a teleological framework on the principle as a whole and an alteration in the description of the speech-writer, since he needs to know something beyond his topic:

[OU<sup>2</sup>] *A written speech is organically unified iff it follows a compelling logic of composition which begins with an accurate definition and proceeds to analyze the topic according to its nature and it is written by someone with dialectical knowledge both of the topic and of the soul in order to lead the souls of the readers in the way that the author desires.*

This amendment is crucial, since the role of the audience is restored to its central place in the goal, or *telos*, of the composition of speeches.<sup>30</sup> Organic unity is no longer its own end, but rather serves the further purpose of persuasive effect on its audience. The author now stands in a relationship to his audience, and this seems to be 'the rhetorical part' that Phaedrus found lacking.

Some difficulties still remain. When Socrates first describes rhetoric as

*psychagôgia*, a 'leading of the soul,' he leaves its ambiguous connotations intact. The term carried the implications both of brain-washing through propaganda or verbal trickery and of education, properly speaking. As I emphasized in discussing the knowledge of the author criterion, knowledge is initially understood as an instrumental good. So too is 'leading the soul' initially understood with its more nefarious implications. Even with this new condition explicit, Socrates leaves deception open as a possible goal of leading the soul. Notice that there is no mention of truth after the 'in order to' clause. A second problem emerges here with more force: the distinction between speaking and writing is several times elided. In fact, when Socrates speaks of identifying the one you meet on the street as possessing a certain type of soul, he certainly seems no longer to be speaking of written discourse.

After Socrates sets the knowledge bar extremely high for the achievement of the art of rhetoric, Phaedrus, in a severe understatement, remarks, "this seems to be no small undertaking" (272b).<sup>31</sup> In response, Socrates examines "an easier and more concise path," thereby setting *truth* and *plausibility* in direct opposition (272c). Plausibility resembles the truth, and draws its power from this resemblance (273d). The more difficult and circuitous path insists on the truth, whereas the pursuit of plausibility causes one to "bid the truth a hearty farewell" (272e). He gives the example, supposedly from the rhetorical handbook of Tisias, of a small, brave man who assaults a big, cowardly one. The small man should insist that he could not possibly have assaulted such a large man, and the large man should insist that the small man had help from others. Neither should tell the truth, since no one would believe it. The argument from plausibility, thus, depends on, appeals to and indeed strengthens the "opinion of the masses" at the expense of the truth (273b).

Socrates insists that one should appeal to and gratify the gods, rather than one's "fellow slaves," since the gods are "masters who are good and from good stock" (274a). One should gratify one's fellow slaves "in a secondary way," presumably by persuading them of the *truth*, and not merely by leading their souls wherever one wishes. In other words, persuading the audience of the truth must be the genuine goal of a written



speech and thus it must be added to the principle of organic unity:

[OU<sup>3</sup>] *A written speech is organically unified iff it follows a compelling logic of composition which begins with an accurate definition and proceeds to analyze the topic according to its nature and it is written by someone with dialectical knowledge both of the topic and of the soul in order to lead the souls of the readers toward the truth.*

The reference to 'truth' in the 'in order to' clause closes off the possibility of deception being a goal of the organically written speech. What is implied by this is a caring, or at minimum beneficent, attitude toward one's audience. The nature of the relationship between author and audience is now clearer: it is that of an educator to a student. The educator, in leading his student toward the truth, displays *erôs* toward him or her.

From the earliest passages in the second half of the dialogue, Socrates conflates speaking and writing. It is only at the end that he finally and wholly answers the question of what makes a *written* speech well done by telling and analyzing a myth about writing "heard from our ancestors" (274c). This confounding of the two is not accidental, as we shall see, since writing well—in the most general sense—is intimately related to speaking well. In discussing this last section of the dialogue on writing,<sup>32</sup> I hope to make the teleological structure of the principle clearer by clarifying the intended audience of written texts, the manner in which they affect their readers, and their proper style. While initially critical of writing, the account does leave writing a positive role.

The first criticisms of writing are those of the divine King Thamus, who rebukes the technician god Theuth for "not speak[ing] beautifully" about his invention of writing (274eff.). While Theuth claims to have discovered a "drug for memory and wisdom", Thamus counters that the former has described "the opposite of their real effect" (274e-275a). First, writing will "produce a forgetting in the souls of those who learn letters," rather than memory, since those who trust writing will rely on it as a "reminder" and deem living memory superfluous (275a). Second, writing offers its students "an apparent, not a true wisdom"; students and readers "appear

rich in knowledge when for the most part there's an absence of knowledge, and they will appear wise rather than being wise" (275a-b). To put this second point more forcefully, instead of producing wisdom, writing will produce the worst kind of ignorance: self-ignorance.<sup>33</sup>

When Phaedrus responds to this myth by playfully mocking Socrates for his ability to construct fables, Socrates rebukes him for caring about the source of claims rather than their *truth*. Whereas Phaedrus blithely assents to Thamus' assessment, Socrates proceeds to analyze the criticisms. The king's criticisms do not leave any space for *good* writing, but Socrates' four-part assessment and critique of the king's criticisms do.

First, Socrates explains why writing can engender self-ignorance without saying that it *necessarily* does. Writings enshrine particular *formulations* which have the appearance of clear knowledge. Someone believing that there will be "something clear and secure in these written forms" is "exceedingly simple-minded" (275c); in possession of these, he might think himself wise when he is not.<sup>34</sup>

Second, Socrates finds a positive role for reminders. By saying that "written speeches are [nothing] more than reminders for a person already in the know" (275d), he departs from Thamus' assessment, since, for the latter, being a reminder was positively detrimental to knowledge and memory. On Socrates' account, though one cannot acquire new knowledge from writings—one cannot learn from them—they can serve as reminders for those who already know. This positive function for reminding echoes the Palinode, where Socrates has claimed that the correct use of reminders (*hupomnasin*) allows one to recollect (*anamnêsis*) what one's soul once saw in the hyperuranium circuit (249c).

Third, Socrates articulates additional criticisms, ones not mentioned by Thamus, based on an analogy with painting. Writing's creations, like those of a painting, "stand there as if alive, but if you question them, they remain in complete and solemn silence" (275d). Written texts are neither responsive nor interactive—one cannot engage them in a dialogue. On the other hand, a written text can be used for any purpose, even by "those who have no business reading it," since a written text cannot discern "to whom it should speak and to whom it shouldn't" (275d-e). A written

speech is "unable by itself to defend or help itself" and thus "always needs the help of its father" (275e). These are serious criticisms, and they threaten to close off the space that Socrates made for good writing. The incentive for reader to read and for author to write seems to dissipate under the weight of these claims. If in reading, all one acquires is a bad interlocutor, one who speaks but neither listens nor responds, then one has little reason to read. If, in writing, all one achieves is the possibility of having one's claims twisted by uncomprehending readers, then one has little incentive to write.

Fourth, Socrates introduces "a legitimate brother" to written speech and places written speech in the context of and in relation to spoken speech. This legitimate brother is "by nature better and more capable" in that it can "defend itself" and "knows when and to whom it should speak" (276a). Socrates identifies this brother as what "is written with knowledge in the soul of one who understands," and Phaedrus clarifies that this is "the speech of a person who knows, a speech living and ensouled, the written version of which would justly be called an image" (276a).<sup>35</sup> The model, or ideal, seems to be the speech of the knowledgeable dialectician, the only one qualified to write in the first place (see above), and his writings are an image of his own dialectical conversations. Clearly, part of the point here is that living dialectic is superior to writing. But it is equally clear that Socrates overtly recognizes a legitimate use for writing. If the knowledgeable dialectician writes, he will do so "in the joy of play," building up a "treasure trove of reminders both for himself ... and for all those who walk down the same path and he'll take pleasure watching the tender shoots in the garden grow" (276d). He repeats this criterion a bit later, restricting an author's readers to "men who know" (278a). Thus, to remedy the difficulty posed by an uncomprehending general readership, Socrates restricts the scope of the legitimate audience to *knowers* including but not limited to the author himself.

Given these considerations, we might reformulate the principle of organic unity as follows:

[OU<sup>4</sup>] *A written speech is organically unified iff it follows a compelling logic of composition which begins with an accurate definition and proceeds*

*to analyze the topic according to its nature and it is playfully written by someone with dialectical knowledge both of the topic and of the soul and it is an image of his own living, ensouled discourse, i.e. dialectic, in order to lead the souls of knowers back toward the truth.* It achieves this by functioning as a reminder of one's already obtained dialectical knowledge (i.e., what is 'written in the soul').<sup>36</sup>

This is an advance on the earlier definition in several important ways. First and foremost, it recognizes the priority relationship between living dialectic and writing. Second, knowledge is recognized as the proper goal of man, and thus the proper goal of writing. Third, it elaborates on the function of writing by specifying a more particular audience, that of knowers, and by articulating the manner of its soul-leading, i.e. reminding. Fourth, it implies the *playful* intention of the author since he will not take his own writings very seriously in the first place. Fourth, it implies a criterion of *style*: since writing is properly an image of living dialectic, it can best achieve its task through the portrayal of living dialectic. Since the knowers presumably arrived at the same knowledge through dialectical inquiry, presumably they can be best reminded of it through an image of dialectical inquiry. A long speech, though not ruled out, would be less ideal.

There are also several problems with this reformulation of the principle. First, we are left with a picture of writing, in which it properly operates only within an elitist, closed system. Writing is either inherently *private*, only functioning as a reminder for the author himself, or inherently *uninformative*, only functioning for the elite group of knowers already possessing the dialectical knowledge. In either case, no souls are led anywhere they haven't already been and the *educative* function of writing seems entirely undermined. The dialogue seemingly established between author and reader is lost. Second, and related, the discussion of the artfulness of rhetoric seems now to have been *irrelevant* to the goodness of writing. Socrates reiterates the conclusions of that discussion (277b-c), emphasizing once again the necessity of dialectical knowledge of both the topic and the soul, if speeches, both spoken and written, are to teach or

persuade. But, on this view, writing is not able to teach or persuade *at all*. Therefore, it cannot be done artfully. Third, Socrates has all along been attempting to generate in Phaedrus a *critical* attitude toward writing, that is, an attitude which entails that one critically examines a text. However, if one sees written texts as reminders for those who know, one might be tempted to think oneself wise, and either see in a piece of writing what one already thinks one knows, or dismiss it as false. Finally, this model conceives of knowledge as straightforwardly attainable and transmittable through oral dialectic, though this seems in contradiction with the account of human nature as *erotic* in the Palinode.<sup>37</sup> The required knowledge of the soul, for example, is there restricted to the gods, while humans can only describes what the soul is like (246a). To this issue, I now turn.

## VI

At one point, Socrates explicitly acknowledges that the bar for good writing is set extremely high. When Phaedrus sums up his impression of Socrates' account, he says, "That's said very beautifully, it seems to me, Socrates, *if only anyone could do it*"; in reply, Socrates claims, "And yet even in *reaching for the beautiful* there is beauty, and also in suffering what one suffers en route" (274a-b). To reflect this striving for the beautiful in the principle of organic unity requires acknowledging the *erotic* nature of man's relationship to knowledge as articulated in the Palinode. There are clear parallels here to the Palinode itself. Recall that *beauty* is precisely the element in which the philosopher most clearly has his vision of the form. So too does the talk of gratifying the gods (274b) reintroduce the divine—so prominent in the Palinode—into the discussion. The mention of the gods' "good stock" hearkens back to the description of the soul's good horse (246a8).<sup>38</sup> In addition, the description of philosophical education in terms of nourishment and procreation has "erotic overtones" and is reminiscent of the Palinode.<sup>39</sup> We must, of course, tread carefully here: what is 'true' and what 'false' in the Palinode is not obvious, though Socrates is convinced that some parts of it are in fact true (265b-c). Even on the most austere, minimalist reading of the Palinode, human nature strives for, but does not achieve, divine wisdom—not even when the soul

is detached from the body does it attain a full view of the beings in the hyperuranian realm (248a-e). In the myth, certain souls do attain a partial view of the forms, but what they see and for how long depends on whose train they are in and how they lived their previous lives.

I propose to reformulate the principle of organic unity in order to acknowledge the erotic nature of man. I will do so in two stages, for clarity's sake, by inserting uncertainty into the definition in the places where full and complete knowledge are assumed. First, I will formulate an alternative to [OU<sup>3</sup>] above, by acknowledging uncertainty in four places: first, the possessor of dialectical knowledge becomes a seeker of dialectical knowledge, i.e. a philosopher; second, the accurate definition and analysis becomes desired rather than completed, third, the teleological function of a written text cannot be guaranteed to succeed since the knowledge of soul will not be complete; finally, what the reader will be turned toward is not the truth but the pursuit of truth, partly alleviating the implication of success. The resulting redefinition runs thus:

[OU<sup>3\*</sup>] *A written speech is organically unified iff it follows a compelling logic of composition which seeks an accurate definition and analysis of its topic and it is written by someone who seeks dialectical knowledge both of the topic and of the soul, i.e. a philosopher, in order to attempt to lead the souls of the readers toward the pursuit of truth.*

As partial confirmation of this move, we might note that when Phaedrus asks what name to assign to the author of written speeches that live up to the ideal, he forgoes "wise person" and instead labels him a "lover of wisdom," i.e. a "philosopher" (278d).<sup>40</sup>

Now I will attempt to rewrite [OU<sup>4</sup>] in such a way that acknowledges man's erotic nature. In addition to the above changes, I make substitutions in three places: first, I substitute 'philosophers' for 'knowers' as the intended audience; second, the reminding is attempted rather than achieved; third, what one is reminded of is not fully achieved dialectical knowledge, but the partial vision of the disembodied soul. The resulting redefinition runs thus:

[OU<sup>4\*</sup>] *A written speech is organically unified iff it follows a compelling logic of composition which seeks an accurate definition and*

*analysis of its topic and it is playfully written by someone who seeks dialectical knowledge both of the topic and of the soul, i.e. a philosopher, and it is a image of his own living, ensouled discourse, i.e. dialectic, in order to attempt to lead the souls of philosophers toward the pursuit of truth. It attempts this by functioning as a reminder of the soul's previously attained knowledge (i.e., what is written in the soul).*

It will be useful to see how this reformulation deals with the objections leveled above against [OU<sup>4</sup>]. First, this principle seems no longer as open to the charge that writing belongs only to a closed elitist system. In one sense, it is still elitist—the intended audience now is philosophers instead of knowers. However, the system is more open in the sense that being a philosopher is not, like being a knower, a settled matter. If one responds to a writing in a philosophical way, then one is in fact one of those to whom the writing is addressed; if not, not. In other words, the 'discrimination' is self-selecting and if one is persuaded by a text that one would like to be a philosopher, then, in some sense, one in fact already is. On this account, dialectic is not a completed achievement, but a process of investigation. The conception of writing is also still in part elitist, as it does claim that good writing will be able to provoke a true insight. These true insights are arguably open only to those whose souls were relatively unencumbered in their circuit around the heavens. But again the matter is not settled ahead of time—by gaining an insight into the matter at hand, you thereby show yourself to have been, in the Palinode's terms, in the train of Zeus in the first place.<sup>41</sup> This account shows good writing to be provocative of philosophical inquiry in its readers, turning their souls toward the pursuit of truth.

Second, on this account, writing can function as a tool for teaching and persuading, and thus can be done artfully. What a text can persuade of, first of all, is the need to engage in philosophical inquiry. It can do this both by provoking an insight into a given topic and by providing a model of critical inquiry—of dialectic—for emulation. What we can learn through the written text will not be a set of doctrines or claims. Rather, we can learn *through* our own philosophical engagement with the text. In this sense, what we learn will be both taught and self-taught. The

dialogue between author and reader, lost in the formulation of [OU<sup>4</sup>], remains here. In addition, the model of oral dialectic, which consisted in the more or less straightforward transmission of knowledge from knower to learner, is more questioning and unfinished, and knowledge remains as its extremely difficult ideal goal. A written speech becomes more like a human being than a tree, which Socrates claims has nothing to teach him (230d). Third, and related, the critical attitude that Socrates takes toward the written speeches within the dialogue and that attitude which he attempts to instill in *Phaedrus* is clearly the kind of attitude that this model encourages for someone approaching a written text. One cannot be certain enough of the author's knowledge or of one's own to accept or reject a text out of hand for failing or succeeding to remind one of one's already obtained knowledge. One must put questions to the text to find out whether it leads somewhere philosophically fruitful. To put the point differently, the success of a written speech is, in the end, up to us, its readers.

## VII

As a final test of the preferability of [OU<sup>4</sup>\*] to [OU<sup>4</sup>], I want to turn to the *Phaedrus* itself to see how these principles fare in assessing both the possible purpose of the *Phaedrus*—its *telos*—as a written work and its much-debated unity. The former is a more important test, in my view, since the reconstruction of the principle of organic unity has shown, if anything, that the arrangement of parts, though not inconsequential, is not the best standard by which to assess a written work.

If Plato were committed to [OU<sup>4</sup>], then his writing and publishing of the *Phaedrus* is somewhat puzzling. We might express this as a dilemma: either Plato thought he possessed dialectical knowledge of the dialogue's topic (intentionally left indeterminate here) and the soul, and he wrote the *Phaedrus* only for himself and his students in the Academy (i.e. those who have walked along the same dialectical path), in which case the rest of us probably have no business reading it; or Plato did not think he possessed the relevant dialectical knowledge, in which case his writing the *Phaedrus* is a performative contradiction. Against the second horn,



it seems clear that Plato could hardly have been unaware of the high standard he was setting for a written text since he calls attention to it in the dialogue (discussed above). Against the first horn, the *Phaedrus* clearly fails to represent a successful dialectical conversation—it does not depict a dialogue that begins with a definition and proceeds to analyze the topic. Nor does it seem to have a unified topic in the requisite sense. So Plato either misunderstood or misapplied his own criteria; both are, of course, possible, but both also seem to make the dialogue, in an important sense, incoherent or self-undermining.<sup>42</sup>

If Plato were committed to [OU<sup>4\*</sup>], however, his writing and publishing of the *Phaedrus* does make sense. On this view, Plato writes the *Phaedrus* as a reminder for its readers to engage in philosophical inquiry.<sup>43</sup> This makes Plato's intention with respect to his readership parallel to that of Socrates with respect to his interlocutors. Both intend to turn the souls of their audiences toward philosophy, to generate in them a true insight into the nature of the topic at hand and, thus, to make them active in the pursuit of wisdom through dialectical conversation. It is the establishment of a kind of dialogue between author and reader. This modest goal seems not to require going beyond the limitations of writing. This dialogue may begin the kind of cycle of oral dialectic that Socrates describes as continuing to "pass this seed on, forever immortal" (277a). If the author of these speeches is properly a philosopher, as Socrates insists he should be called (278d), then success is measured by the number of critical responses and discussions that it has provoked in other philosophers. By this measure, the *Phaedrus* is an exceedingly successful written work.

I think I have shown that organic unity is not an end in itself, since the true measure of a written work lies not in the organization of its parts but in the souls of its audience. In one sense, this paper is an attempt at making organic unity a central concern of the *Phaedrus*, and this is shown to be an impossible task. So, an *excessive* focus on the unity (or not) of the *Phaedrus* is misguided.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the principle of organic unity (on either the [OU<sup>4</sup>] or [OU<sup>4\*</sup>] formulation) shows that Plato considered organic unity a *desideratum*, and that he likely thought the *Phaedrus* unified. The question is, does [OU<sup>4</sup>] or [OU<sup>4\*</sup>] better reflect

the kind of unity the dialogue has? I will approach this question through two puzzles: What exactly is main *topic* of the *Phaedrus*? How could the *Phaedrus* be an instance of an organically unified work if it contains the parody of Lysias, an example of a poorly unified work? [OU<sup>4\*</sup>] gives more adequate answers than [OU<sup>4</sup>] with respect to both puzzles.

The kind of unity demanded by [OU<sup>4</sup>] is more rigid than that of [OU<sup>4\*</sup>], in part because the model of oral dialectic associated with [OU<sup>4\*</sup>] is more fluid than that associated with [OU<sup>4</sup>]. [OU<sup>4</sup>] assumes that a written work both represents and reminds its audience of the successful dialectical analysis of a single topic.<sup>45</sup> Though dialectical analyses are certainly present, the *Phaedrus* is clearly not organized around a single topic or theme.<sup>46</sup> There are, as many have point out, several topics or themes that hold the dialogue together: *erôs*, rhetoric, the soul, self-knowledge, philosophy, etc. On [OU<sup>4</sup>], we seem to need to make a choice, but each choice must ignore evidence for the other possibilities. By contrast, [OU<sup>4\*</sup>] is more flexible, since it makes a written work representative of a dialectical analysis that was not necessarily successful. If one seeks rather than achieves a dialectical analysis of one's intended topic, then, like in an ordinary conversation, one will *perhaps* move from the initial topic to a related one. This is to deny that organic unity entails unity of theme or topic. These reflections perhaps even warrant a small amendment to [OU<sup>4\*</sup>], changing "the topic" to "the topic(s)".

The speech of Lysias, which not only lacks organic unity but is foolish and irreverent as well, also seems out of place given [OU<sup>4</sup>]'s more rigid conception of unity. It is strange that Plato would include it in an avowedly organically unified work, since it seems to undermine any claim the dialogue has to organic unity: it is not a dialectical analysis, it purports to be written by someone without knowledge, and it is intentionally deceptive. In addition, though Socrates admits that the speech is not entirely false, it's hard to see how successful oral dialectic requires the inclusion of false or misleading claims about *erôs*, or how exposure to such claims will remind one of the truth. On [OU<sup>4\*</sup>], however, Plato's goal is the generation of true insight(s) and the provocation of philosophical inquiry. A false and poorly unified speech might, to someone already

interested in speeches, be used to provoke a philosophical response, as Socrates does with *Phaedrus*.<sup>47</sup> For one who already knows, by contrast, this seems a perverse strategy. Plato's fourth century readers were more likely to be interested in rhetorical speeches than, for example, his students in the Academy. To be successful in rhetoric, both the principle of organic unity and the dialogue as a whole show, requires knowledge. To acquire knowledge requires endeavoring to pursuit it, i.e. doing philosophy.<sup>48</sup>

The conclusion that one should pursue knowledge is not only repeatedly argued for, but the structure of the dialogue leads one, step by step through its seemingly disparate parts, to this conclusion. I can only briefly sketch the dialectical or palinodic progression I have in mind here.<sup>49</sup> As we saw, Socrates' non-lover speech, while surpassing Lysias' in unity and organization, was still committed to a one-sided account of *erôs* and thus did not exceed it in truth. So Socrates literally takes that speech back and offers the Palinode in its place, with its grand vision of a noble form of *erôs*. While the Palinode was clearly more adequate with respect to *erôs*, it does not enact one of the core teachings of that speech. Socrates is giving a long speech to *Phaedrus* and not investigating along with him, as the Palinode recommends. After the Palinode, Socrates does engage in a dialectical inquiry with *Phaedrus* into the nature of rhetorical speeches, thus enacting the model of education articulated in the Palinode. But that dialectic calls attention to itself as written by highlighting the distinction between writing and speaking, thereby revealing the limitations of the written work of the *Phaedrus*. We are thus encouraged to respond to the written *Phaedrus* in the way that Socrates responds to the myth of Theuth and Thamus, that is, by analyzing, assessing, and criticizing it to see where its truth lies. To do this is already to begin to do philosophy.

## Notes

- 1 See Catherine Lord, "Organic Unity Reconsidered", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 22 (1964), pp. 263-268 (pp. 263-4).
- 2 The major works on the *Phaedrus* which I have consulted are R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952); G. J. de Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969); Christopher Rowe, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986); Charles Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986); G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus*

- (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- 3 On the question of the unity of the dialogue, see P. Plass, "The Unity of the *Phaedrus*", in *Symbolae Osloenses*, 43 (1968), pp. 7-38; Luc Brisson, "L'Unité du Phèdre de Platon: Rhétorique et Philosophie dans le Phèdre", in *Understanding the Phaedrus*, ed. Livio Rossetti (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1992), pp. 61-76; Malcolm Heath, "The Unity of the *Phaedrus*", in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 7 (1989), pp. 151-73, 189-91; Christopher Rowe, "The Unity of the *Phaedrus*: A Reply to Heath", in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 7 (1989), pp. 175-88; Daniel Werner, "Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Problem of Unity", in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 32 (2007), pp. 91-137.
- 4 Except where noted, all translations are from Stephen Scully, *Plato's Phaedrus* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2003).
- 5 Because of this, Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 130, claims that the whole section (263d-266d) is "of relatively small importance."
- 6 Socrates articulates the knowledge of the author as a precondition for a good speech even before he asserts the organic ideal. He claims that beautiful speech depends on the prior possession of "a discursive understanding (*dianoian*) of the truth about the subject" (259e). When 'Lady Rhetoric' chastises Socrates and Phaedrus, she says that one should "master the truth and then take me up" (260d).
- 7 There is a translation issue here: Rowe takes the phrase to mean 'after the lover is done *with his speech*,' rather than 'with his love.' The Greek here is ambiguous, but if we take it in the first way, then it's not clear what aspect of the second element Socrates is faulting. See Rowe, *Plato: Phaedrus*, p. 99.
- 8 Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 31, for example, regards the speech as hardly worth attention: "This tedious piece of rhetoric deserves little comment".
- 9 Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, pp. 47-55, claims that Socrates' criticisms "border on the crass."
- 10 See Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, pp. 49-55, 88-95.
- 11 On Lysias' use of ordinary language, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, "Lysias", in *The Critical Essays: Vol. I*, transl. Stephen Usher, in *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), §2.
- 12 See Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, p. 49; C. Carey, ed., *Lysias: Selected Speeches*, in *Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 8.
- 13 Socrates' first speech proceeds systematically: he begins with an account of the nature of love (237a-238c), proceeds with an characterization of the lover and the kind of beloved he desires (238d-239a), clarifies how the lover harms the beloved, sorting out harm to boy's soul (239a-c), harm to his body (239c-d), and harm to his property (239d-240a), gives an account of why it might *seem* pleasant to take a lover (240a-d), enumerates the unpleasant experiences of the beloved (240d-e), describes the end of the affair (240e-241b), and finishes up with a summary (241b-d). Notice that Socrates places the end of the affair at the end of his speech where it belongs according to the logic of his speech.
- 14 On Plato's use of parody, see Franco Trivigno, "The Rhetoric of Parody in Plato's *Menexenus*," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 42 (2009), pp. 29-58. Since it is not essential to my argument here, I will not be analyzing Lysias' work in order to assess the justness of the parody.
- 15 See Paul Shorey, "On the Erotikos of Lysias in Plato's *Phaedrus*," in *Classical Philology*, 28 (1933), pp. 131-132; George E. Dimock, "Alla in Lysias and Plato's *Phaedrus*", in *The American Journal of Philology*, 73 (1952), pp. 381-396.
- 16 On *kai men dê*, see J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 395-7; on *eti de*, see Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, pp. 162-3; Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 703. Scully's translation represents the disjointed effect very well by translating the former as "And another thing" and

- the latter as "Besides," and beginning a new paragraph each time one occurs: Scully, *Plato's Phaedrus*, pp. 7-11.
- 17 On contrasting versus non-contrasting use of *men ... de*, see Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, pp. 369-70.
  - 18 Compare Socrates' first speech, which uses *men ... de* almost as often—fourteen times—but *never* to contrast lovers and non-lovers or to contrast the same things twice.
  - 19 Dimock, "Alla in Lysias and Plato's *Phaedrus*," pp. 292-4; Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, pp. 1-3.
  - 20 That said, Dionysius, "Lysias," §19, praises Lysias for being particularly good at probability arguments.
  - 21 See Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 46. By contrast, Socrates invents a story about a man in love trying to convince his beloved that he is not in love, and this secret lover does address the boy in the vocative, twice as "my darling boy" (237b, 241c). Indeed, it is as though the true addressee of the speech is Phaedrus himself: see the flirtatious double entendre of 243e.
  - 22 Dimock, "Alla in Lysias and Plato's *Phaedrus*," pp. 393-4.
  - 23 Dimock, "Alla in Lysias and Plato's *Phaedrus*," pp. 384-5. Compare: Socrates' first speech, which focuses only on the lover, causes Phaedrus to complain that Socrates is only half-way done, to which Socrates replies, "whatever we've said in reproach of the one, the opposite holds true of the other—all good things. Why make a long speech of it?" (241e).
  - 24 See Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, p. 51. Perhaps the most famous rhetorical set-piece is Gorgias' *Encomium to Helen*. R. G. Tanner, "Plato's *Phaedrus*: An Educational Manifesto?" in *Understanding the Phaedrus*, ed. Livio Rossetti (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1992), pp. 218-221, finds clear allusions to this text in the *Phaedrus*.
  - 25 Socrates' 'non-lover' is in love with the boy, but in intentionally deceiving him, he fails to demonstrate adequate care.
  - 26 I will bracket, for the sake of this argument, the complicated questions of the relationship between knowledge and *eudaimonia*, and of that between knowledge and virtue. It seems clear, however, both in terms of the *Phaedrus* itself and for Plato's philosophy more generally, that knowledge and human flourishing are intimately linked.
  - 27 Phaedrus speculates that the technical terms from the rhetorical handbooks might indicate what has been left out, and Socrates ironically praises him for it (267d). However, Socrates then shows these only to be "prerequisites" which stand in need of proper arrangement (268a-270d). Cp. Isocrates, "Against the Sophists," in *Isocrates: Vol. II*, transl. George Norlin, in *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), §§16-18. de Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato*, p.15-18, sees many allusions to Isocrates throughout the dialogue.
  - 28 Cp. Socrates' earlier reflections on self-knowledge, where he claims that he is "still not able to 'know [him]self,' as the Delphic inscription enjoins" and wonders whether he "happens to be some sort of beast even more complex in form and more tumultuous than the hundred-headed Typhon, or whether [he is] something simpler and gentler, having a share by nature of the divine and the unTyphonic" (229e-230a). This passage is important for Griswold's interpretation: see Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, pp. 36-44.
  - 29 Socrates talks here of knowing the "appropriate time" (272a). Cp. Isocrates, "Against the Sophists," §12.
  - 30 In emphasizing the function of speeches, my account of unity is similar to that expressed by Heath, "The Unity of the *Phaedrus*," p. 163. Heath's argument relies too heavily on cultural considerations and not enough on the text of the *Phaedrus*: see Werner, "Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Problem of Unity," p. 125-7. My own argument is not open to this charge.
  - 31 Based on a close analysis of Socrates' praise of Pericles at 269e-270a, Brisson, "L'Unité du Phèdre de Platon: Rhétorique et Philosophie dans le Phèdre," pp. 61-76, argues that the knowledge of the whole of nature is required, thus setting the bar for rhetoric even higher.

- 32 This section of the dialogue has generated much scholarly interest, and I will not be able to do it full justice here. However, I do think that the attention it has gotten has too often ignored or downplayed the larger context, and my discussion might serve as a counterbalance: see e.g. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum International, 2004), pp. 67-186.
- 33 See Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, pp. 205-6.
- 34 As Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 212, puts it, the danger that writing poses is precisely that it "will not adequately induce self-questioning in its readers."
- 35 It is possible that Phaedrus is here drawing on what he has read from Alcidas, the orator and rival of Isocrates, who explicitly compared written to spoken speeches in this way. See Alcidas, *On the Sophists* §§27-28, in J. V. Muir, *Alcidas: The Works and Fragments* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2001). He claims that written speeches "should be thought of as images and patterns and imitations of speeches", that they are like statues and depiction of animals, that they are "fixedly unable to respond to critical moments" and that "speech spoken on the spur of the moment has a soul in it and is alive." According to Muir, *Alcidas*, xi-xii, he was concerned with "establishing real audience contact" through "the appearance of direct, spontaneous communication" based on the premise that "'live' responsive communication and a real relationship with an audience was the most effective way of making a public speech." It is not clear whether Plato is drawing from Alcidas, or vice versa. Muir, *Alcidas*, p. xiv, assumes without argument that Alcidas is responding to Plato. I see no reason to make this assumption.
- 36 This last clause is perhaps problematic, since dialectical knowledge is arguably not equivalent to what is 'written in the soul.' One might claim that what is written in the soul is likely a noetic vision of the truth, one similar to but more complete than that obtained in the hyperuranium realm. Socrates explicitly says that what is written down cannot be the complete formulation, suggesting that knowledge, properly speaking, will not be discursive in nature. Even so, then dialectical knowledge will be an indication that one has knowledge written in the soul as well.
- 37 See Christopher Gill, "Dogmatic Dialogue in *Phaedrus* 276-7?" in *Understanding the Phaedrus*, ed. Livio Rossetti (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1992), pp. 156-72. Gill points out that the "dogmatic" reasons for criticizing writing are not identical to what he calls the "skeptical" reasons outlined in the Seventh Letter. What he fails to point out though is that the "dogmatic" reasons outlined in this section are in fact in tension with the Palinode's picture of human nature.
- 38 See Scully, *Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 63n.138.
- 39 Werner, "Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Problem of Unity," p. 101.
- 40 One might object that I have neglected an alternative possibility here. The author might be said to possess *partial* knowledge of forms, in the sense that the souls of those who follow in the train of their god attain partial knowledge of the forms. On this objection, I need not diminish the author's knowledge since he possesses it prior to becoming embodied. However, this option seems ruled out here by the fact that in both cases it is *dialectical* knowledge that the author is said to possess—this sort of knowledge is surely not tantamount to the partial glimpse that the soul achieves in its heavenly circuit.
- 41 See Rowe, "The Unity of the *Phaedrus*: A Reply to Heath," p. 181.
- 42 Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, pp. 11-16, persuasively argues that the charge of authorial incompetence should only be levied as a last resort, after the assumption of a unified meaning has proven untenable.
- 43 On the provocation of philosophical inquiry as a unifying purpose of the dialogue, see e.g. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus*, pp. 9, 136-7; Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, pp. 222-3.
- 44 Cp. the similar advice of Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, p. 232. I do not thereby consider my view to representative of what Werner, "Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Problem of Unity," pp. 125-9, calls the "debunking approach." My point is not to suggest that unity should not be a concern of

the interpreter, but rather that an *excessive* focus on unity will cause one to miss the philosophical point entirely.

- 45 Gill, "Dogmatic Dialogue in *Phaedrus* 267-7?" p.163, nicely points out a dilemma for [OU4]'s model of oral dialectic: "If knowledge of truths can be transmitted [through dogmatic oral teaching], why cannot this be done as well through writing as through oral discourse – indeed perhaps done even better through writing?"
- 46 See Werner's incisive critique of what he calls "thematic monism," the assumption that the *Phaedrus* contains one main or central theme to which all others are subordinate: Werner, "Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Problem of Unity," pp. 94-109.
- 47 See Heath, "The Unity of the *Phaedrus*," p. 173.
- 48 McCoy makes this point central to her interpretation of the *Phaedrus*: Marina McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chapter 7.
- 49 This understanding of the dialogue's structure is essentially Griswold's: see Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, pp. 218-9, 230-33. See also Werner, "Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Problem of Unity," pp. 120-22.